

ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS



Director-General

The Hague, 29 July 2014
L/ODG/192695/14

OPCW

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Dear Co-Signatories,

I am writing in reply to your letter dated 27 June 2014. I am grateful for the interest that you have shown in the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme and for the support that you have shown for the overall mission. I have noted the concerns raised in your letter in relation to the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons aboard the Cape Ray vessel in the international waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that the safety of people and protecting the environment has been one of the foremost considerations in all activities relating to the transportation and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. Indeed, the Chemical Weapons Convention requires that "Each State Party, during transportation, sampling, storage and destruction of chemical weapons, shall assign the highest priority to ensuring the safety of people and to protecting the environment. Each State Party shall transport, sample, store and destroy chemical weapons in accordance with its national standards for safety and emissions." Furthermore, the Convention explicitly prohibits certain, previously used, methods of destruction, namely "dumping in any body of water, land burial or open pit burning".

With regard to your specific comments on the destruction of two types of chemical agents aboard the Cape Ray, I would like to stress that hydrolysis is a mature technology that has been used for decades, for example within the US chemical destruction programme, with no incidents of harm to people or the environment. While this technology has never before been used onboard a ship, the US authorities have undertaken rigorous trials of the Field Deployable Hydrolysis System (FDHS) since it was installed aboard the ship and have implemented numerous safety and containment measures.

The Pancretan Commission Against the Destruction
of Syrian Chemical Weapons in The Enclosed Sea of
the Mediterranean Sea
Herakleion
Greece

OPCW inspectors conducted a final engineering review of the FDHS earlier this year and, pursuant to the facility agreement for the FDHS aboard the Cape Ray which was approved by the OPCW Executive Council, all destruction operations are conducted in accordance with US national regulations relating to the protection of people and the environment. Finally, a team of four OPCW inspectors are permanently aboard the Cape Ray in order to verify the destruction of the chemical weapons and to ensure that the Convention's provisions relating to the safety of people and the protection of the environment are upheld. Our team reports on a daily basis that all operations are conducted in a manner consistent with these obligations and that all effluent is safely stored onboard the ship.

The Cape Ray is handling only some of the chemicals removed from Syria, more are being disposed of at commercial facilities in Finland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Destruction operations are well underway and around one third of the chemicals declared by Syria have already been destroyed either within Syria, onboard the Cape Ray or at the commercial facilities. All of these activities, and the preceding transportation of the chemicals to the disposal facilities, have occurred in accordance with international and national regulations, and without mishap. The effluent from the destruction on the Cape Ray will be securely stored before being disposed of at facilities in Finland and Germany.

The Secretariat stands ready to provide further information as appropriate. Please be assured that we are committed to providing as much information on this unprecedented operation as possible and we value the continued support of concerned organisations for the lofty goal of eliminating chemical weapons worldwide.



Ahmet Üzümçü